

Marvel 'Mask' Phillips out for 3 weeks helps Blues into final

JUST how much Wycombe Wanderers have missed John Maskell during the past three weeks was clearly illustrated in the second half of their Berks and Bucks Senior Cup semi-final replay at Slough on Saturday.

The veteran goalkeeper, now recovered from a back injury, produced two marvellous saves just after half-time and was thus largely instrumental in helping Wycombe to their first victory over Slough in four matches this season.

More important he has almost ensured that the Senior Cup will return to Loakes Park for a second successive season. In the final, due to be played on Easter Monday, Wanderers now play Hungerford of the Isthmian League Division Two.

Lightning

Maskell's spell of brilliance came at a time when Wycombe led 1-0 and were desperately trying to hold on to their advantage. The Rebels, keen to get back into the game, forced a corner immediately after the restart.

The ball was half-cleared to Barry Friend on the edge

By MICHAEL KNOX: Slough 0, Wycombe 1

of the penalty area. Friend caught it just right and sent a powerful shot screaming towards the goal. But Maskell reacted like lightning and dived to his left and somehow turned the ball round a post.

His colleagues came up to congratulate 'Mask' but that was not the end of his work. The ball had gone for another corner and the tall Barry Metcalf, for once, rose to beat Keith Mead in the air. But Maskell was alive to the danger and this time tipped a dangerous effort over the bar.

Maskell was one of three Wanderers to return to the side after the midweek defeat by Croydon. Paul Birdseye, having recovered from 'flu, resumed at right back, allowing Steve Hardwick to move into the centre of the defence to replace Alan Phillips who is away in America, and Stewart Atkins was preferred to Dylan Evans.

Wycombe, who seemed more determined to win, dominated the first half. Their accurate passing and determination to close down every Slough attack kept them in command for long periods.

They took the lead in the 26th minute following a clever piece of play by Howard Kennedy who seems to reserve his best performances for cup matches.

After winning the ball in a strong tackle just outside the Slough penalty area, Kennedy dummied to go one way, but went the other before slipping the ball through to Scott who beat Richard Teale from 12 yards with a shot just inside the left post.

Both Birdseye and Steve Long went close to increasing the lead before the interval but in the second half it was Slough's turn to create chances. But thanks to Maskell and some wayward shooting that Wycombe were able to survive.

The visitors seemed to be holding on without alarm, when given a mighty shock in the 89th minute. A through ball by John Beyer found Paul Lee completely free inside the penalty area. A goal seemed certain when Maskell appeared to bring Lee down.

Even the most ardent Wycombe fans expected a penalty. But referee Mr Tilley, to general amazement, waved play on. Slough players protested

vigorously and in the meantime Atkins raced clear at the other end of the field and had a great chance to sew up the match.

He sent his shot just wide, but the final whistle went immediately to give Wycombe a deserved but, in the end, a lucky victory.

SLOUGH: R. Teale; T. Turl, R. Mackay, I. Cooke, R. Strong, J. Beyer, P. Lee, A. Gahe, B. Metcalf (sub: S. Norman, 79 mins), B. Friend, M. Kiely. Sub (not used): M. Cumber.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, R. Davies, K. Mead, L. Reed, S. Hardwick, S. Atkins, M. Hollifield, S. Long, H. Kennedy, T. Scott. Subs (not used): D. Evans, C. Way.

Referee: E. P. Tilley (Swindon). **Half-time:** 0-1. **Scorer:** Wycombe: Scott (26 mins).

Phillips out for 3 weeks

WYCOMBE centre-half Alan Phillips has had to go to America on business and will therefore be missing from the side for about three weeks.

This means that Keith Mead and Steve Hardwick will continue their partnership at the back for tonight's visit to Oxford City in the Berger Isthmian League. Oxford have improved since their 2-0 defeat at Loakes Park earlier in the season but recent defeats by Barking and Walthamstow have dented their confidence.

The final of the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup against Hungerford on Monday, April 16 will be held at Marlow. This is good news for Blues fans who have done their fair share of travelling this season.

Wycombe are holding a players dance at the clubhouse on Saturday evening, when there will be a 'live' group playing. Tickets, price £1, can be obtained on Thursday evening at the ground.